

CHARTER SCHOOL INFORMATION

MAINE
CHARTER SCHOOL
COMMISSION

2016

www.maine.gov/csc

Maine Charter School Commission

Members

Shelley Reed, Chair
Ande Smith, Vice Chair
John Bird
Nichi Farnham
Jana Lapoint
Laurie Pendleton
J. Michael Wilhelm

Contacts

Address: Burton M. Cross State Office Building
111 Sewall Street
Mailing: 182 State House Station
Augusta 04333-0182
Phone: 207-624-6729
Email: mcsc@maine.gov
Website: www.maine.gov/csc

Staff

Bob Kautz, Executive Director
Gina Post, Dir. of Program Management
Heather Fuller, Administrative Assistant

Maine Resources

Maine Department of Education - Charter Schools
www.maine.gov/doe/charterschools
Maine Association for Charter Schools
www.mainecharterschools.org

Maine's Public Charter Schools

Acadia Academy

12 Westminster St., Lewiston 04240
www.acadiaacademy.org

Baxter Academy for Technology & Science

54 York Street, Portland 04101c
www.baxter-academy.org

Cornville Regional Charter School

1192 West Ridge Road, Cornville 04976f
www.cornvilleregionalcharterschool.org

Fiddlehead School of Arts & Science

25 Shaker Road, Gray 04039h
www.fiddleheadschoool.org

Harpswell Coastal Academy

9 Ash Point Road Harpswell 04079
www.harpswellcoastalacademy.org

Maine Academy of Natural Sciences

16 Prescott Lane, Hinckley 04944b
www.means-gwh.org

Maine Connections Academy

75 John Robert's Road, Suite 11B
South Portland 04106
www.maineconnectionsacademy.com

Maine Virtual Academy

6 Chestnut Street, Augusta 04333
www.mainevirtual.org

Snow Pond Arts Academy

8 Goldenrod Lane, Sidney 04330
www.snowpondartsacademy.org

(See page 5 for further school information)

Table of Contents

What is a Public Charter School?	4
What is the Maine Charter School Commission?	5
Maine's Public Charter Schools	6
Applicable Chapters, Laws, Rules & Statutes	9
Additional Maine Laws that Apply to Charter Schools.....	10
Impact of Other Laws and Requirements	11
Public Charter School Funding.....	12
Frequently Asked Questions	14

What is a Maine Public Charter School?

Charter schools are public schools of choice. Students can decide to attend a charter school as an alternative to the district public school to which they have been assigned.

Charter schools are publicly funded schools, created and governed by volunteers in a non-profit organization, and operated independently of the traditional public school system. Charter schools have more flexibility than traditional public schools over decisions concerning curriculum and instruction, scheduling, staffing and finance.

In return for this flexibility, charter schools are held accountable to the terms of contracts (their charters) that authorize their existence. In addition, they must adhere to all applicable federal laws, health and safety laws, and the same academic standards to which all public schools are accountable.

Each charter school must be authorized by a charter school “authorizer”. Maine’s law designates as authorizers: 1) the Maine Charter School Commission; 2) a local school board; or 3) a collaborative of school boards working together..

A charter school is awarded a charter if its application is approved by its authorizer after a rigorous review process. At that point, a contract is negotiated specifying the measures by which the school will be evaluated as the authorizer monitors the school’s performance, especially in the areas of finance and academics.



Charter contracts are for five years, over which time the charter school’s authorizer will carefully analyze the school’s performance. If the charter school fails to measure up, it may be closed. If it is judged successful, financially stable and achieving positive student achievement, its contract will be renewed for an additional five years.

When Public Law 2011, Chapter 414 took effect in 2011, Maine became the 41st state to allow public charter schools. Maine's first public charter schools opened in the 2012-13 school year. Seven Maine public charter schools are currently in operation, and two more will open for the 2016-2017 school year.

What is the Maine Charter School Commission?

The Maine Charter School Commission was created by Public Law 2011, Chapter 414, to authorize and oversee public charter schools in Maine. A 10 school limit was placed on the number of schools the Commission could authorize in the first 10 years.

Maine's charter school law provides guidance for the Commission in the following areas:

- 1) Content of applications that must be filed by charter school founders;
- 2) Execution of charter school contracts with the charter school's governing boards;
- 3) Oversight of charter schools it has authorized, including academic and operational accountability;
- 4) Analysis of data provided to the Commission by the charter school; and
- 5) Monitoring to ensure legal compliance with all applicable state and federal laws, rules and regulations.

The Maine Charter School Commission consists of seven members appointed by the State Board of Education for three-year terms. Three members must be members of the State Board of Education, and they nominate the other four members from the public at large, who must be approved by a majority vote of the State Board of Education.



In addition to fulfilling its statutory obligations, the Maine Charter School Commission provides information to the public regarding charter schools in Maine.

The Mission of the Maine Charter School Commission

To allow charter schools to be established as public schools that:

- Improve pupil learning by creating more high quality schools with high standards for pupil performance;
- Close achievement gaps between high-performing and low-performing groups of public school students;
- Increase high-quality educational opportunities within the public education system;
- Provide alternative learning environments for students who are not thriving in traditional school settings;
- Create new professional opportunities for teachers and other school personnel;
- Encourage the use of different, high-quality models of teaching and other aspects of schooling; and
- Provide students, parents, community members and local entities with expanded opportunities for involvement in the public education system.

Maine's Public Charter Schools

Acadia Academy

"ACADIA" is an acronym for "A Charter Academy for Developing Independence and Achievement". The school will open for the 2016- 2017 school year, providing a rigorous, comprehensive educational program for children of the Lewiston/Auburn area in grades pre-k through 2, eventually to grade 6.

ACADIA will promote high educational achievement through directed teaching opportunities that are entwined with extensive experiential learning opportunities.

ACADIA faculty and staff will support the development of the whole child as each student develops academically, socially and emotionally in a safe community that requires personal accountability and meaningful participation.

It is our intent to support our individual students in developing their full potential, while teaching them the value of belonging, connectedness and contribution to our larger community.



Baxter Academy for Technology and Science

Baxter Academy for Technology and Science, located in Portland, opened its doors in September 2013. The school's students come from 42 Maine school districts, spanning from Blue Hill to towns south of Kennebunk.

Baxter's curriculum is rooted in inquiry and project-based learning, and is connected across subjects. The school's mission is to be a rigorous, college preparatory high school promoting student ownership of learning through a curriculum focused specifically on science, technology, engineering, and math. Its vision is to use a technology-rich, project-based learning approach to education at the secondary level.



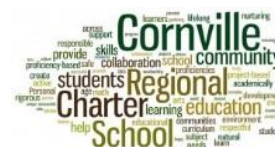
Cornville Regional Charter School

Cornville Regional Charter School, was the first elementary public charter school in the state of Maine.

Located in Cornville, it opened its doors on October 1, 2012, to students in grades K-6. Currently, the school educates students from 6 Maine school districts from St. Albans to Fairfield and points in between.

The school's mission is to create a safe, respectful, nurturing and active learning community where every child is given the opportunity to thrive academically, to be accepted, to celebrate accomplishments and to develop a lifetime love of learning.

Its vision is to create a school where learning is built around each student so that they become engaged learners with relevant and challenging work.



Fiddlehead School of Arts & Sciences

Fiddlehead School of Arts & Sciences, located in Gray, opened its doors in September 2013. The school's students come from 16 Maine school districts from Portland to Rumford.



Fiddlehead's curriculum is based on the Reggio Emilia learning approach; Image of the child; children's relationship and interactions within a system; role of the families; role of space; and teacher and children as partners in learning.

Fiddlehead's mission is to unfold the potential of children, in a respectful, loving culture through authentic and meaningful experiences that sustain a sense of wonder, a love of learning, and embrace the interconnectedness of all things. Its vision is to provide for the foundational needs of growing children in a community where children, teachers, and families learn together in a nurturing environment.

Harpswell Coastal Academy

Harpswell Coastal Academy located in Harpswell, opened in September 2013. The school serves students from Portland to Wiscasset with students from 13 Maine school districts.

Its curriculum is based on incorporating marine and natural resources, farms and forests, and sustainable entrepreneurship often through direct and ongoing partnerships with professionals in those fields.

Harpswell's school's mission is to offer rigorous, personalized, project-based education to mid-coast Maine students. Its vision is to use Maine's shorelines, working waterfronts, forests, and farms as classrooms. The school's goal is to prepare caring, creative, resilient citizen-scholars who will flourish in a rapidly changing economy.



Maine Academy of Natural Sciences

Maine Academy of Natural Sciences (MeANS), located in Hinckley, opened in September 2011, and was the first Maine high school to focus on the natural sciences.



Currently, the school educates students from 25 Maine school districts from Portland to Athens. Its mission is to offer a student centered, staff guided high school whose purpose is to inspire and engage students.

MeANS welcomes a diverse range of students including those whose previous learning environment has not inspired them to fulfill their potential as learners, those who have become profoundly disconnected from their education as well as those who have a passion for the school's themes of agriculture, forestry and sustainability.

Its vision is to encourage students to re-engage with their education, to grow as critical thinkers and problem solvers by developing habits of heart and mind that lead them to take responsibility for their own actions, as well as for the welfare of their community.

Maine Connections Academy

Maine Connections Academy, located in South Portland, opened in September 2014 as Maine's first virtual public charter school, and it currently educates students from 96 school districts statewide.



The school's curriculum combines online and offline resources working with specialists to deliver comprehensive, high quality education. The school's mission is to help each student maximize his or her potential and meet the highest performance standards through a uniquely individualized learning program in grades 7-12 for students who need an alternative to the traditional classroom.

MCA's vision is to reach students for whom a virtual approach provides the best pathway to school success through an individualized learning program that combines the best in virtual education with close connections among students, family, teachers, and the community to promote academic and emotional success for every learner.

Maine Virtual Academy

Maine Virtual Academy, located in Augusta, opened in September 2015 as the second virtual public charter school in Maine. Currently, Maine Virtual Academy educates students from 99 school districts all over the state of Maine.



Its curriculum is based upon the teaching affiliated with the K- 12 Inc. online program. It offers courses in Language Arts/English, Math, Science, History, Art, Health/PE and Music. The school's mission is to develop each student's full potential with learner-centered instruction, a research-based curriculum and educational tools and resources to provide a high quality learning experience for grade 7-12 students in need of alternative educational options.

Maine Virtual Academy's vision is to improve student learning outcomes through individualized instruction, as evidenced by student academic proficiency, student academic growth, post-secondary readiness, and the demonstration of skills such as critical thinking, problem solving, and self- direction.

Snow Pond Arts Academy

Snow Pond Arts Academy, located in Sidney, will open for the 2016 2017 school year as a performing arts charter high school that integrates power of the arts with a rigorous academic experience.

Snow Pond Arts Academy (SPAA) will enroll 9th or 10th grade students first, with grades 11 and 12 being added in subsequent years. The performing arts curriculum in music, theater and dance will include lessons, technique classes, small and large group ensembles, comprehensive courses in theory, history, and more.



Maine Charter School Laws & Rules

Maine Public Law 2011, Chapter 414: Public Charter School Law (Effective 9-28-11)

Maine Education Statute - Title 20-A: Chapter 112: Public Charter Schools

Specific provisions for charter schools, including enrollment process, performance expectations, charter renewal, external audits.

Maine Department of Education Rules - Chapter 140: Public Charter Schools

Specific provisions for charter schools, including enrollment, records transfers, participation in the state data system. (Adopted 12-2-12)

Maine Charter School Commission Rules

Chapter 1 – Commission Organization and Operation (Effective June 16, 2013)

This rule describes the organization and operation of the Commission.

Chapter 2 – Procedures for Commission Authorization of Public Charter Schools

(Effective May 1, 2012; Amended June 16, 2013)

This rule sets forth the process by which the Maine Charter School Commission solicits, accepts and reviews applications for the formation of public charter schools. The rule also sets forth the performance indicators that will be used as the performance framework for any approved application and minimum requirements for a sound charter contract in the monitoring and compliance of the contracted public charter schools.

Chapter 3: Procedures for Charter School Renewal (Effective June 23, 2014)

This rule sets forth the process by which the Maine Charter School Commission decides whether to renew the charter of a public charter school according to Maine Revised Statutes Title 20-A Chapter 112 § 2411 Charter Term and Renewal.

Additional Laws Applicable to Maine Charter Schools

(updated October 2014)

- Federal laws and regulations, including IDEA and section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, ADA, FERPA, ESEA, Civil Rights
- Local ordinances
- State educational assessment system
- Fingerprinting/criminal record check
- Freedom of Access law
- Open Meeting Laws
- Conflict of Interest law for school governing boards
- Health and Safety
 - Health screening,
 - Communicable disease control
 - Safe water supply requirements; Air quality, HVAC
 - School health services (school nurse, physician)
 - Sanitation standards
 - Safety (firearms, anti-hazing)
 - Prohibition on use of performance enhancing substances
 - School substance abuse services
 - State Fire Marshal inspection for Fire Safety compliance
 - Control of hazardous chemicals
 - Immunization requirements
 - School bomb threat procedures and reporting
 - Emergency management planning
 - Medication administration procedures, including laws and rules relating to epi-pens
 - Safe and efficient transportation
 - Suicide prevention training
 - Concussion management
 - Bullying prevention
- State Human Rights Act
- Teacher certification (if not otherwise qualified)
- Collective bargaining
- Special education, including federal and state law and rule (MUSER)
- Non-religious association with public school
- Military recruitment in school
- Any other law made specifically applicable to charter schools

Impact of Other Laws & Requirements

(updated October 2014)

In general, state laws that apply to school administrative units do not apply to public charter schools unless the law is made specifically applicable to them, or the charter school Chapter, Title 20-A, Chapter 112, includes reference to the law.

However, charter schools may be required by other mandates to follow the same or similar requirements as state law. Examples include the following:

- (1) Federal requirements such as FERPA apply to charter schools, so many of the Maine laws on student record maintenance and confidentiality apply to charter schools through the federal law and regulations.
- (2) The schools' authorizer (the Maine Charter School Commission) may include the statutory requirement in its contract with the charter school. This is the case with the requirement that students receive a diploma only if they have demonstrated proficiency in the 8 content areas of the Maine Learning Results and the Guiding Principles.
- (3) Guidance from the US Department of Education related to Maine's Flexibility (waiver) from NCLB/ESEA requires that charter schools be included in the requirement to implement teacher and principal evaluation and support systems (performance evaluation and professional growth systems (PE/PG) under T. 20-A, chapter 508).
- (4) While the statutory process for student expulsion may not apply to charter schools, they are required to provide due process to any students who face potential expulsion, so they follow many of the same procedures as required by state law.

Public Charter School Funding

LD 131 (PL 2015 Ch. 54)

Based on the passage of LD 131 in 2014, PL 2015 Ch. 54, the State Department of Education will make direct payments to those public charter schools (PCSs) authorized by the Maine Charter School Commission; local school administrative units will no longer make payments to these public charter schools.

The calculation of “each” public charter school’s subsidy will be based on a calculation similar to the public school administrative unit’s State Calculation for Funding Public Education (PreK-12) Report (ED279) and mirrors those requirements in current law for funding public charter schools.

Public Charter School (PCS) ED279 Subsidy Printout:

- PCS EPS Per-Pupil Rates – will be based on the EPS Per-Pupil Rates of the student’s resident school administrative unit (SAU). For the estimated new students, the State Average EPS Per-Pupil Rates will be used.
- Student counts for funding allocations will be based on prior year October 1st student counts plus estimated counts for those public charter schools that have increased enrollment ceilings established by the Charter School Commission.
- PCS Operating Allocation will include allocations for students who are economically disadvantaged, limited English proficient and targeted funds (Assessment/Technology/PreK-2).
- PCS Other Subsidizable Costs will include allocations for students who are identified (IEP) as special education and if the public charter school is eligible, funding will also include allocations for transportation and gifted & talented programs.
- PCS Operating Allocation will be adjusted by the same transition percentage as applied to the SAUs – currently 97%
- PCSs are not eligible for the following funding:
 - declining enrollment adjustments
 - isolated small school adjustments
 - debt service allocations
 - bus purchases.

Other Funding:

- **Special Education:**

- High cost in-district – additional allocation assigned to the public charter school because of a high-cost in-district special education placement in accordance with section 15681-A, subsection 2, paragraph B. *“B. For high-cost in-district special education placements. Additional funds must be allocated for each student estimated to cost 3 times the statewide special education EPS per-pupil rate. The additional funds for each student must equal the amount by which that student's estimated costs exceed 3 times the statewide special education EPS per-pupil rate;”*
- High cost out-of-district – additional allocation assigned to the school administrative unit because of a high-cost out-of-district special education placement in accordance with section 15681-A, subsection 2, paragraph C. *“C. For high-cost out-of-district special education placements. Additional funds must be allocated for each student estimated to cost 4 times the statewide special education EPS per-pupil rate. The additional funds for each student must equal the amount by which that student's estimated costs exceed 4 times the statewide special education EPS per-pupil rate;”*

- **Career & Technical Education (CTE)**

- Cost of CTE education programs – a public charter school student's eligibility for and the funding of the student's career and technical education programming are the same as if the student were attending school within that student's resident school administrative unit.
- Transportation to CTE programs – If the public charter school is located outside the student's resident school administrative unit, the public charter school is responsible for ensuring that the student is transported to the career and technical education center or to a location from which the student will be transported to the career and technical education center by the resident school administrative unit, the career and technical education region or the career and technical education center.

Payment Process

Any estimated student counts will be reviewed and adjusted based on the fall student counts in the new school year.

The 3% payment for the Maine Charter School Commission will automatically be withheld from the Charter School ED 279 calculations and the Department will transfer these funds to the Maine Charter School Commission.

Payments to public charter schools will be made monthly July through June same as for district school administrative units.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is a Public Charter School?

Charter schools are public schools of choice that students can choose to attend as an alternative to traditional public schools. Maine's seven charter schools currently enroll 1500 students, a little less than 1 percent of the 186,000 public school students in Maine.

How is a Maine public charter school different from a private school or a magnet school?

Public charter schools cannot charge tuition or set admissions standards, as private schools and magnet schools can.

Why are public charter schools good for Maine?

Charter schools give families an opportunity to choose a public school most suitable for their child's educational well-being.

How are students admitted to Maine public charter schools?

Public charter schools in Maine must accept any Maine resident student who wishes to attend. If there are more applications than openings, a lottery system is used. When a local school district authorizes a public charter school, enrollment preference may be given to students residing in that district.

Who can authorize Maine public charter schools?

In Maine, there are two types of entities permitted to authorize public charter schools. The Maine Charter School Commission can authorize up to 10 public charter schools throughout the state during the first 10 years of Maine's charter school law. Local school boards, or multiple local school districts working collaboratively, also have the ability to authorize charter schools within their school administrative units.

Who oversees a Maine public charter school?

Public charter schools are overseen by the Maine Department of Education, the Maine Charter School Commission, and the school's own board of directors. Charter school boards of directors are not elected officials; rather, the school asks them to serve.

How are Maine public charter schools funded?

Charter schools are public schools; therefore, the money that follows the students who choose to attend charters remains in the public education system. No public charter receives more funding than a traditional school district. General education revenue must be paid to a charter school as though it were a district school.

Can Maine public charter schools charge tuition?

No. A public charter school may not charge tuition and may only charge such fees as may be imposed by other non-charter public schools in the state.

Do teachers in Maine public charter schools have to be certified?

Full-time teachers in a public charter school must either hold an appropriate teaching certificate or become certified within three years of the date they are hired. Teachers with an advanced degree, professional certification, or unique expertise or experience in their curricular area are exempted from the certification requirement. Charter school administrators do not need to be certified.

What is a virtual public charter school?

A virtual public charter school is a public charter school that operates predominantly through an online program.

How are Maine public charter schools evaluated?

The Maine Charter School Commission has three-member teams that visit each school to review data and report annually. The Commission is mandated to prepare a report on each school by June 30 of its fourth year of operation. If serious issues arise, the Commission has the authority to revoke a charter at any time or not to renew it at the end of five years.

Do Maine public charter school students have to meet the same graduation requirements as traditional public school students?

In 2012, the Maine Legislature passed a law mandating that all public school diplomas in Maine be awarded based on the mastery of knowledge and skills in eight content areas. The Maine Charter School Commission has made the proficiency requirements part of the charter contracts.

Can students with disabilities or special education needs attend a public charter school?

Yes. Public charter schools are required to provide special education services just like traditional public schools. All have special education teachers on staff.

What is the role of collective bargaining in public charter schools?

Public charter school employees are permitted to form unions and participate in collective bargaining, as any public school may do.

More information is available at:

www.maine.gov/csc

MAINE CHARTER SCHOOL COMMISSION

Burton M. Cross State Office Building
182 State House Station
Augusta 04333-0182

207-624-6729

mcsc@maine.gov

www.maine.gov.csc